

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
NOVEMBER 17, 2014
APPLICATION FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS
C14H-1990-0007
Nelson Davis Warehouse
117 W. 4th Street

PROPOSAL

Demolish the existing temporary rooftop storefront and construct a new storefront and canopy; signage.

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

Storefront and canopy:

The applicant received approval for a rooftop use on this building in March, 2012 for a storefront 20 feet back from the front parapet, an overhanging roof that would be 15 feet from the front parapet, and a guardrail 2 feet back from the front and side parapets. The applicant now proposes to demolish the “temporary” storefront that was constructed on the building before a tenant was selected for this space and to construct a new storefront. The approved design (2012) had prefinished metal panels along the east wall of the rooftop addition, and a metal-framed glass storefront. The prefinished panels on the east wall of the addition will stay, but the previously approved storefront will be a combination of vertical rust-colored metal panels, metal-framed folding glass panels, and a folding glass window. The overhanging canopy will be modified from the existing metal framing to a metal roof over the existing framing and an extension with metal roofing.

The applicant further proposes to install umbrellas and patio tables on the rooftop; the umbrellas will be red with integral lights and electric heaters. The applicant further proposes the installation of red globe light pendants from the roof of the canopy. The umbrellas will be set against the front guardrail; with the proposed extension of the canopy, the red globe lights will be approximately 7 feet back from the front parapet.

Signage:

The applicant proposes several signs for the new tenant. The first is a rooftop sign that will be installed on the canopy, and will have internally-lit letters channel letters with acrylic faces. The proposed rooftop sign will be 71.4 square feet – with the tallest letters being 31 inches tall, and the length of the sign extending 27’ – 8.25” along the canopy.

The second sign is an internally-lit aluminum cabinet above the door. This sign is proposed to be 10.67 square feet, and will be 8 feet across and 16: high. The aluminum cabinet will have push-through acrylic letters.

The third sign is a blade sign at the front door. The blade sign will be round and hung from an Asian-style bracket. It will be internally lit, with an aluminum cabinet and push-through acrylic letters. The sign will be 11.11 square feet, excluding the bracket (3’ -4” round cabinet).

STANDARDS FOR REVIEW

The Commission’s Standards for Review of applications for Certificates of Appropriateness include:

- Do not destroy the distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment. Avoid the removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features.

- Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties are appropriate when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historic, architectural, or cultural material and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, neighborhood, or environment.
- Construct new additions or alterations to structures in such a manner that if such addition or alteration were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure will be unimpaired.

The Architectural Design Guidelines for historic districts and historic landmarks state:

- ◆ Minimize the visual impact of rooftop uses as seen from the street.
- ◆ Set activities back such that they are not visible from the sidewalk below. At a minimum, they should be set back the height of a one-story building. This includes trees, umbrellas, and tables.

The Downtown Austin Plan recognizes the significance of the Warehouse District, and proposes a minimum of a 10 foot setback and a preferred 15 foot setback for all rooftop additions in the Warehouse Building. The section of the Downtown Austin Plan that addresses rooftop uses in the Sixth Street National Register Historic District also confirms that the desired setback is 15 feet for all rooftop uses.

Sign standards:

I. SIGN TYPES

A. FLUSH-MOUNTED SIGNS

A flush-mounted wall sign is one that is mounted flat to the wall.

LOCATION

- Locate a flush-mounted wall sign just above the display window. Do not locate a flush-mounted wall sign above second-floor windows.
- When feasible, place a wall sign such that it aligns with others in the block.
- When planning a wall sign, determine if decorative moldings exist that could define a “sign panel.” If so, locate flush-mounted signs such that they fit within panels formed by moldings or transom panels on the façade. In no case should a sign obscure significant façade features.

SIZE

- In general, the maximum wall sign area on a building should not exceed 7% of the overall façade area; in some cases, however, the Commission may consider approving a maximum of 10%, if overall compatibility with the District is demonstrated.
- The maximum height of an individual flush-mounted sign shall be 2 feet.

NUMBER OF SIGNS

- Only one flush-mounted sign shall be allowed for each distinct façade module.

B. PROJECTING SIGNS

LOCATION

- A projecting sign should be located near the business entrance, just above the door or to the side of it, near eye level. The bottom of the projecting sign, however, shall be a minimum of 9 feet above the sidewalk.

SIZE

- The maximum size of an individual projecting sign (one face) shall be 6 square feet. It may not extend from the building façade for a greater distance than 6 feet or a distance equal to 2/3 the width of the abutting sidewalk, whichever distance is less.

NUMBER OF SIGNS

- In general, only one projecting sign per building façade is allowed. However, where the Commission determines that the result would be compatible with the District, one projecting sign shall be allowed for each distinct facade module of a building.

INAPPROPRIATE SIGN TYPES

- Signs that are out of character with those seen historically, and that would alter the historic character of the street.
- Free-standing signs, either pole-mounted or monument types.
- Animated signs.
- Sandwich (or menu) boards that stand on the sidewalk are generally discouraged.
- Any sign that visually overpowers the building or obscures significant architectural features.
- Roof signs.

IV. SIGN LIGHTING

- Use an external, shielded lamp to direct light at the sign.
- DO NOT USE:**
1. Internal illumination
 2. Fluorescent lights
 3. Sodium vapor lights.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Not reviewed.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Storefront and canopy:

Approve the storefront modification, but deny the extension of the canopy over the patio. The Commission was very clear in its 2012 approval of this rooftop use that the storefront was to be 20 feet back from the front parapet and the canopy was to be no closer to the front parapet than 15 feet. Those restrictions should still apply. Staff would also recommend that the proposed canopy have a minimal horizontal presence on the front and side of the building so as to minimize its visual impact on the historic character of this landmark. While the previous approval allowed a guardrail to be 2 feet back from the front parapet, the addition of umbrellas with integral lights and electric heaters and red globe light pendants will create too much of a draw away from the historic building. Recognizing that a rooftop use must have something to attract attention from the street, staff recommends reconsideration of the umbrellas and globe pendants too close to the parapet as to cause a visual intrusion on the building's historic character.

Signage:

Deny the application for the sign on the canopy as this constitutes a rooftop sign, prohibited by the Sign Standards. In addition, the canopy sign has internal illumination, which is not allowed on a historic landmark.

Deny the lighting for the sign proposed over the front door and the blade sign – while both these signs are a little larger than the Sign Standards allow, the biggest issue with both of them is their internal illumination. Recommend that the applicant re-design the signs at pedestrian level to follow the City’s Sign Standards for historic buildings and districts, which would mean indirect illumination of both signs.